

German Unification

Main Idea

In the late 1800s, Otto von Bismarck transformed Germany from a loose confederation of separate states into a powerful empire.

Steps Toward Unification

Germany was not a unified nation in 1848, although the patchwork of independent states did have a common language and culture.

Nurturing Nationalism

- Napoleon nurtured nationalism by uniting German states into confederation
- 1815, after Napoleon's defeat, Congress of Vienna retained organization, renamed it German Confederation
- 39 separate states with common language, culture poised for movement to unite

Revolution

- 1848, revolution swept through Europe
- German liberals also took opportunity to revolt
- Differed over whether to support constitutional monarchy or republic
- Agreed that German unity would promote individual rights, liberal reforms

Unkept Promises

- Facing calls for increased democracy, Prussian king **Frederick Wilhelm IV** promised constitution, other reforms
- End of 1848, went back on promises; constitution never written
- Banned publications, organizations that supported democracy

Economic, Cultural Unity

- 1834, **Zollverein**, customs union, created; removed tariffs on products traded between German states
- Inspired businesspeople to support unification; encouraged growth of railroads connecting German states; joined Germans economically
- German economy growing; sense of German culture growing as well

Bismarck's Plan for Germany

- **Otto von Bismarck**, conservative politician, leading force behind German unification
- Became prominent in Prussian politics
- 1847, gave strongly conservative speech at National Assembly
- 1862, new Prussian king, **Wilhelm I**, chose Bismarck as prime minister

Bismarck's Philosophy

- Not liberal like revolutionaries
- Conservative, supported king of Prussia
- Believed Prussia destined to lead German people to unification
- Practiced **realpolitik**, policies based on interests of Prussia

"Blood and Iron"

- Politics of reality evident in push to increase Prussian military power
- Speech to Parliament: German unity not won by speeches, majority vote but by "blood and iron"
- Built Prussian army into great war machine

STEPS TO UNIFICATION IN GERMANY

QUICK
FACTS

In the mid-1800s many Germans were driven by nationalistic feelings to support a unified Germany.

The Revolution of 1848

- Inspired by revolution in France and a desire for a united Germany, Germans revolt against the Prussian king.

The Promise of Reforms

- At first, the Prussian king Frederick Wilhelm IV agrees to bring about democratic reforms, but later breaks his promises.

The Zollverein

- Germans create an economic alliance between the German states, the Zollverein, which promotes trade and a strong economy.

German Unification

- Otto von Bismarck leads Germany towards unification using his political philosophy of realpolitik, or "the politics of reality."

Bismarck's First War

Disagreement Leads to War

- Disagreement over two border states—Schleswig, Holstein—gave Bismarck opportunity to begin war with Denmark
- 1864, formed military alliance with Austria against Denmark
- Believed both Schleswig, Holstein should be controlled by German Confederation

Result of War

- After brief fight, Denmark gave territory to Austria, Prussia
- Prussia controlled Schleswig, Austria controlled Holstein
- Austria now held small bit of territory inside Prussia
- Bismarck knew to unite Germany, war with Austria inevitable

Unification and Empire

Bismarck could not increase Prussia's power as long as Austria was in the way. But with two short wars, Bismarck moved Austria out of the way and established a unified German Empire.

Preparations

- Bismarck worked behind scenes
- Promised Venetia to Italy in exchange for support
- Persuaded Napoleon III to keep France neutral

Provocation

- Bismarck sent Prussian troops into Austrian state of Holstein
- Austria declared war on Prussia
- Holstein skirmish gained Prussian support for war

Nationalism

- In address to Prussian people, King Wilhelm I blamed Austria for starting war
- Appealed to peoples' sense of nationalism

France and Austria

Austro-Prussian War

- War unfolded just as king, Bismarck planned
- Highly-skilled, well-equipped Prussian army defeated Austrians in only seven weeks
- Treaty ending **Austro-Prussian War** dissolved German Confederation, forced Austria to surrender Holstein

Unification

- Several other northern states united with Prussia
- Only three southern states remained outside Prussian control
- Bismarck, Wilhelm used victory to rally other German states around Prussia; war first step toward German unification

The Franco-Prussian War

Unified Germany

- Despite Austro-Prussian War victory, it would take another war to create unified Germany
- Southern German states still not included in North German Confederation

Nationalism in South

- 1870, conflict brewing with France over disputed Alsace, Lorraine territory
- Provinces had been part of Holy Roman Empire, which included Prussia
- Issue sparked nationalistic feelings in south German states

Peace Treaty

- Southern states supported Prussia, north German states in war with France
- 1871, Bismarck won **Franco-Prussian War**
- Peace treaty declared unification of Germany

Creating the German Empire

Peace treaty had far-reaching consequences

- Victory established unified German empire
- Representatives of allied German states met at Versailles, near Paris
 - Proclaimed Wilhelm I first kaiser—emperor—of German Empire
 - Wilhelm appointed Bismarck first chancellor
- German victory changed balance of power in Europe
 - Napoleon III gone; France no longer as powerful
 - As Germany grew economically, new empire rose in power

The Empire's Growth and Change

In the years after 1871, Germany prospered. Under the leadership of Wilhelm I and Bismarck, Germany developed into a strong empire. This period was known as the Second Reich, or empire, because Germans considered the Holy Roman Empire to be the First Reich.

A New Government

- Germany's 25 separate states wanted to retain some power
- Government took federalist form; power shared between state, national governments, Wilhelm led government
- Political parties developed

Government and the Church

- Bismarck believed Roman Catholic Church posed threat to government
- Believed government, not church, should control aspects of culture, like education
- Worked to restrict influence of Catholic Church in Germany

This struggle between the government and the church was known as Kulturkampf, which means "the struggle for culture."

Economic Growth

Railroads

- After unification, Germany experienced time of economic growth
- France had paid reparations—money for war damages
- German leaders used some money to build railroads to link German states

Industrial Growth

- Other funds helped build German businesses
- New empire began to catch up with other industrialized countries of Europe
- Coal mines, steel factories flourished in Germany's major cities

Path to Social Reforms

- Industrialization had critics in Germany
- German socialists protested against harsh factory conditions
- Called for state control of all industries

Legislation

Bismarck tried to destroy socialism

- Blamed socialists for two assassination attempts on emperor
- Sought to reduce appeal of socialism by enacting own reforms
- 1880s, pushed through legislation providing benefits for:
 - Health
 - Accidents
 - Old age
 - Disability

Bismarck and Wilhelm II

After Unification

- Bismarck did not want to expand Germany's borders
- Believed France remained a threat, however

Bismarck Out

- 1888, Wilhelm's grandson became kaiser
- Wilhelm II fired Bismarck as prime minister after disagreement

Alliances

- Bismarck made alliances with Austria-Hungary, Italy, Russia
- Nations agreed to help protect one another from possible attack

Wilhelm II

- Early 1900s, continued to make alliances with other European nations
- Built up most powerful military force in Europe